

Full Circle

Couple looks back on UF days

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When Anil Rajvanshi first met Nandini Nimbkar back in 1975 at UF, it was love at first sight.

Sort of.

"I'm sure there was an instantaneous chemistry," Anil said.

For Nandini, sparks didn't fly so quickly.

"I didn't really feel it," Nandini said.

She would soon enough. Over the next several months, Anil invited her over to his dorm for countless dinners.

Their friendship blossomed into romance.

On Dec. 12, 1976, the couple was married at a friend's home in Gainesville, with a handful of classmates and close friends as witnesses.

After nearly 31 years of marriage, two daughters and a lifetime devoted to India's renewable energy resources, Anil and Nandini haven't forgotten the role UF played.

In 2005 their oldest daughter, Noorie, left India for the first time in her life to study mechanical engineering at UF, the same field her father pursued 30 years ago.

"We are the Gator family," the 25-year-old graduate student said.

How they met

Before Anil met Nandini, and before Noorie was even a glimmer of a thought, Anil remembers when he first arrived in the U.S.

When the young student landed in New York City just before New Year's Eve for a layover, he saw what seemed like an entire city "kissing in

the streets." Traditionally in India, such public displays of affection are traditionally uncommon.

For Anil, who had no idea what life at UF would be like, the culture shock hit him head-on.

"It was a very different world altogether at that time," he said.

And Anil's mind was on higher education, not love — until he met his future wife.

Nandini, an agronomy student who was originally born in the U.S., had lived most of her life in western India, where a phone call meant traveling more than 60 miles away from home.

When Anil first spotted Nandini in the Reitz Union food court, he noticed that she was nearly four inches taller than him and looked so thin she seemed "one-dimensional," Anil said.

"I thought maybe she didn't get enough to eat," he said.

After the two fell in love, neither wanted to go back to India to get married.

"I never really wanted a traditional marriage with pomp and ceremony," Nandini said.

A conventional Hindu wedding would have lasted several days and included an endless number of friends and relatives, she said.

Instead, the couple gathered about 10 classmates and friends and convinced a local priest to include Hindu readings into the ceremony.

When they had their wedding photos taken, Anil remembers, the photographer insisted that Nandini sit and Anil stand behind her so that their height difference wouldn't be as obvious.

Nandini kept her maiden name after they got married — in tradi-



Courtesy of Anil Rajvanshi

Nandini Nimbkar and Anil Rajvanshi pose at a UF awards dinner in 1997 where Nandini received an award honoring her as an outstanding female alumna.

tional Indian culture, the wife's first and last name change when she weds, Anil explained.

"It was really revolutionary at that time," he said of Nandini's choice to keep her name.

From UF to India — and back again

After finishing school at UF, Anil and Nandini went back to India determined to put their knowledge to work.

Together the couple began running the Nimbkar Agricultural Research Institute (NARI) in Maharashtra, India. It was started by Nandini's father in 1968.

As the institute started to flourish, Anil spent his time studying renewable energy sources, while Nandini focused on efficient crop production.

At that time, jobs in India for college graduates were virtually nonexistent.

"Without madness, you can't make such decisions," Anil said of leaving the U.S. to work in India.

Meanwhile, Noorie and her younger sister Madhura spent most of their childhood without a TV in the house.

Instead, Anil and Nandini splurged on subscriptions to scientific journals, which their daughters

saw them studying every night.

As a result, Noorie and Madhura loved to read and hated to miss school, Noorie said.

When Noorie first came to UF in 2005, her father showed her a plaque in front of the University Auditorium, where her mother's name is engraved.

In 1997, Nandini was recognized as one of 47 outstanding female alumnae chosen in honor of the 50th anniversary of coeducation at UF.

She is the only Indian on the plaque.

As a new student, Noorie found herself surrounded by an extended family of her parents' former classmates.

One of those classmates is the assistant vice president of research for the University of Central Florida Pallavoor N. Vaidyanathan.

Vaidyanathan, whom Noorie calls "uncle," is currently in Gainesville working on a project in research administration.

Vaidyanathan remembers many of the 100 Indian students who were at UF back when Anil and Nandini first met.

He can rattle off a list of his former classmates and where they settled in the U.S.

But Anil and Nandini are the only students he can remember who

had the chance to go back to their home country right after school, he said.

"Philosophically, they were kind of made for each other," Vaidyanathan said.

Partners in love, business

Anil and Nandini still run NARI, where they focus on improving life for India's rural communities. He is the director and she is the president.

Through improvements to cooking and lighting, the couple is working to close the gap between India's rural and urban societies.

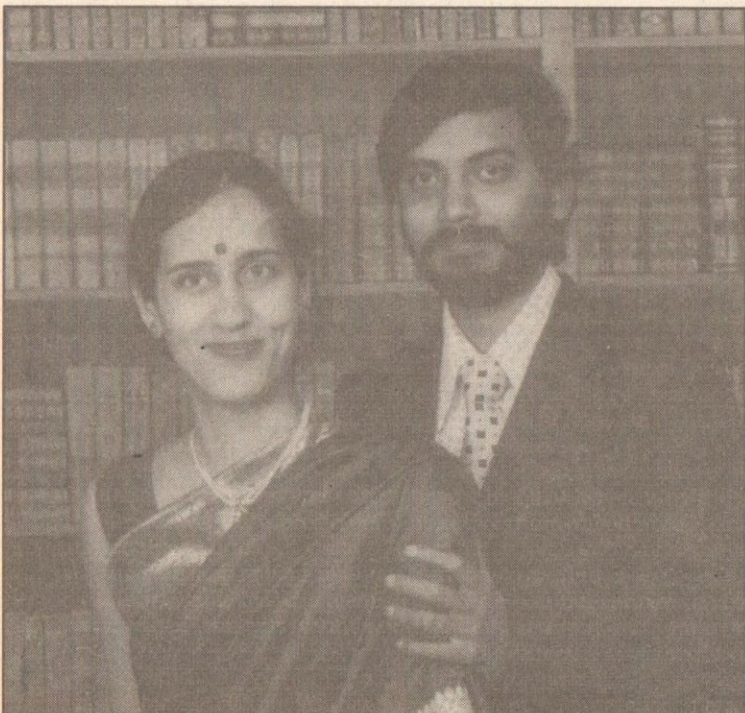
"Since they work together, they spend, like, the whole day together," Noorie said.

Anil's accomplishments through the couple's institute include an energy-efficient lantern, which he named "Noorie."

The couple's work includes the development of a hardy hybrid of sweet sorghum called "Madhura," after the couple's younger daughter, used to produce ethanol.

But despite the couple's love of education, research and improving India's resources, their primary devotion is to each other.

"Without commitment, there is no relationship. Without commitment, there is nothing in life," Anil said.



Courtesy of Anil Rajvanshi

Nandini Nimbkar and Anil Rajvanshi, who met as students at UF, pose in a studio after their wedding in Gainesville in 1976.